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Lucia A Keegan 11/07/2006 02:58:46 PM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: UNESCO - MUSEUM PROGRAMS UPDATE

¶1. The Ambassador met on 3 November with Laurent Levi-Strauss, Director of UNESCO's Museums Section. Levi-Strauss also provided us with a memo (which will be forwarded separately by e-mail) detailing the current status of UNESCO's museum pilot program.

¶2. Levi-Strauss described the 11 pilot projects and museum partnership programs, which are part of UNESCO's program for the Preservation of Endangered Moveable Cultural Properties, funded principally by the US (US dollars 3.5 million from fourth quarter 2003 monies).

¶3. Levi-Strauss was very frank about the difficulties he faces at UNESCO headquarters, trying to run the programs, "by remote control," with no direct power over the way the programs are implemented in the field. At the same time, he noted that the implementation rates over the past year have gone up, with 54 percent for the overall program.

¶4. He described ICOM (International Council of Museums), his principal advisory partner, as having a weaker than expected professional team, with no capacity for implementing projects. He also said that they lack a network of experts of the same quality that ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) or other museum advisory groups have. Levi-Strauss added that the Museum section itself often has the needed connections to find experts and trainers, and questions the need to pay ICOM for less than satisfactory contacts.

¶5. Levi-Strauss said that many of the field offices are having difficulty carrying out their projects, citing, general incompetence or poorly trained colleagues and consultants, who are unable to deliver minimal results. He mentioned Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Ghana as some of the more poorly run projects.

¶6. In the case of Pakistan, he noted the problems of massive disorganization at every level from the Ministry of Antiquities and Museums on down, coupled with earthquakes and anti-Western

demonstrations, which obliged a planned trip to be cancelled. He noted, however, that a workshop would be taking place in Peshawar in mid-November in an effort to improve the situation.

¶17. Ambassador Oliver told Levi-Strauss that she was very displeased with the overall situation regarding the museum projects, noting that the US had not been consulted at all in the original decision regarding the choice of projects or countries. The Ambassador said that what we want to know is what we are achieving with the money being spent. She said that the US funding was hoped to build greater capacity, skills and experience for the museum professionals in each country, providing a showcase for projects that would serve as success stories and help generate more financing. Instead, we have an inherent problem where UNESCO headquarters is responsible for allocating funds, but has no say in the implementation of programs.

¶18. The Ambassador said that we have, in these cases, the perfect example of UNESCO's move towards decentralization without accountability. Levi-Strauss agreed, saying that the main problem is that the directors of the field offices depend on the Bureau of Field Coordination (BFC) and not on the program sectors for direction. Levi-Strauss said that the only way he can offset this problem today is by developing personal relations with the field directors, who are often in place for many reasons, but not necessarily for their level of competence.

¶19. Ambassador Oliver told Levi-Strauss that we are interested in helping him improve the current situation, but that we need to understand better what and where the problems are. Levi-Strauss told her that part of the difficulty is a lack of resources. He mentioned that the US dollars one million allotted for regular program activities, 50 percent automatically goes to the field offices, and the rest is divided up for the Museum Magazine publication costs, ICOM costs and other costs at headquarters. The rest is shared by the 40 field offices, providing them only with some US dollars 10,000 each.

¶10. As one way to improve the knowledge sharing within the section, Levi-Strauss mentioned an idea that has been proposed of a Washington DC-based meeting in 2008, after all the projects are completed. The meeting would bring together the leaders of the 11 pilot programs, enabling them to meet US museum experts and review the projects case-by-case in an effort to improve future work in a "lessons learned" approach.
OLIVER